

Mary Cassatt

by Elizabeth Dean

Mary Cassatt was born in Pennsylvania on May 27, 1844. She was born to a well-off couple, Robert and Katherine Cassatt. When she was young, Mary traveled widely in Europe, learning from the art and culture there. Many years later, Mary decided that she wanted to be a painter, although her parents objected. Eventually they relented, and allowed her to attend the Pennsylvania Academy of fine arts in 1861 at age 17.

Yet Mary was unhappy at the Academy. She hated the way her male teachers and classmates treated her disdainfully. She would not stand for it. She left the Academy and decided to study the old masters on her own. She moved to Paris four years later.

In Paris, she studied under many masters, including Charles Chaplin. She also studied by copying paintings at the Louvre. She became so skilled that her painting, *The Mandoline Player*, was accepted to be displayed in the Paris Salon in 1868.

In 1870, because of impending war, Mary moved back to America to live with her family. Her parents paid for her everyday needs, but refused to pay for her painting supplies. Mary, living in a small town, could not find buyers for her paintings and therefore could not afford to buy her own equipment. Mary became so discouraged that she nearly gave up painting entirely.

A few months later, she received a commission from an Italian archbishop. Mary happily left for Italy. After her work in Italy, Mary lived Spain for several years, painting the beauty that she found there. In 1872, another of Mary's paintings was accepted to the Salon.

From 1875 to 1877, none of Mary's works were accepted. Mary found that women were rarely accepted unless they had a friend among the judges. This mad Mary very angry and she stopped submitting paintings.

Soon afterward, Mary met Edger Degas, a famous impressionist. Mary tried impressionism, and loved working with pastels. But in 1882,

Mary's beloved sister Lydia died, devastating Mary. She stopped painting for a long time. But Mary never gave up entirely.

In 1891 Mary started art again, but this time tried making prints, in a distinctly Japanese style. Her most common subjects of the time were mothers and children, although Mary had no children of her own.

Mary did very well until about 1910, when she became very ill and her eyesight was disintegrating. Yet she continued to paint until 1914, when she was nearly blind.

Mary Cassatt had the skill and the courage to succeed in a male world. She would not stand to be treated as inferior. She did not give up when life was hard, only when it was impossible. Mary Cassatt died in 1926.